



For Immediate Release

October 15, 2009

**KEEP WARM, KEEP SAFE!
Risks of Home Heating Fires Rise as Temperatures Drop**

Jackson – With temperatures in Mississippi forecasted to fall into the 30's and 40's this week, Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney urges the public to be mindful of the fire risks associated with home heating.

“During the fall and winter months, too many fires and fire deaths are caused by faulty heating equipment or people using ill-advised methods to stay warm,” Chaney said. “Working smoke alarms can cut the risk of people dying in home fires in half.”

Incidents involving heating equipment remain the second highest cause of fires in the home. A National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) report shows 73% of home heating fire deaths can be attributed to space heaters. The peak time for home heating fires is between 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., with associated deaths occurring between midnight and 10:00 am.

Mississippi still leads the nation in fire deaths. As of October 1, 2009, there have been 63 reported fire deaths in Mississippi. The State Fire Marshal's Office has investigated 52 of these fire related deaths. This time last year (2008), the State Fire Marshal's Office had investigated 40 fire deaths. Fire safety education and preventing fire deaths are priority goals of the State Fire Marshal's Office.

The State Fire Marshal's Office recommends the following cold weather fire safety tips:

- All heating equipment should be UL® approved and cleaned and inspected by a qualified professional prior to being used each year.
- Remember to keep clothes, drapes, and anything else combustible at least 3 feet away from all heating equipment, especially space heaters.
- Inspect the space heater's power cord for damage, fraying or heat. If the cord inspection reveals any of these issues, the heater should be replaced. Proper cleaning is essential and should be done regularly.
- Never use space heaters while you sleep, when you are away from home, or in areas where children may be without adult supervision.
- Always unplug space heaters when they are not in use. The heater should also be equipped with a tip over shut-off switch.
- Use only traditional heating equipment.
- Never use a stove or oven to heat living spaces. Kerosene is a poor choice for heating as it will give off poisonous fumes.
- Have chimney flues cleaned and inspected by qualified personnel
- Have a spark screen that is age appropriate for all individuals using any area to be heated by a fireplace
- Burn only approved materials in a fire place or wood burning stove; never burn paper or trash in a fireplace or wood burning stove.
- Should a fire break out in the home, have an emergency evacuation plan for the family to follow and have a designated meeting place for all family members. Once everyone is outside the burning home, call 911 and DO NOT RE-ENTER THE HOUSE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES!!!

For more fire safety information and tips visit the special "October is Fire Prevention Month" web page on the Mississippi Insurance Department website at www.mid.state.ms.us. (Look for the link in the notifications tab.) You can also find the Mississippi State Fire Marshal on Facebook and follow them on Twitter at twitter.com/msfiresafe.

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